



California Postsecondary Education Commission

Proposed Revisions to the Commission's Guidelines for Approval of Community College Educational Centers

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Introduction

In 2008, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors amended its Title 5 Regulations to include provisions for granting conditional approval for educational centers. Prior regulations pertained to full or final approval only. The Commission's current guidelines do not contain provisions for conditional approval.

This agenda item outlines recommended enhancements to the Commission's educational center approval criteria so that they are reasonably consistent with the revised Title 5 Regulations. The recommendations are submitted as an information item to allow sufficient time for the public and educational entities to provide comments and suggestions. The recommendations will be submitted to the Commission for action at its March 2009 meeting.

Background

Legislation passed in 2006 established a new system for allocating state revenues to community college districts. The legislation required the Board of Governors to develop criteria and standards in accordance with prescribed statewide minimum requirements. In May 2008, the Board of Governors adopted regulations to implement the new funding system. Because the funding system calls for community college districts to receive apportionments based in part on the number of educational centers in a district, the system office deemed it necessary to revise the definition of educational centers and the criteria that would qualify centers for apportionment revenue and capital outlay funding.

Purpose of Educational Centers

Previous Commission reports have highlighted the value and importance of educational centers. Foremost, they are considered a cost-effective way to meet increased student demand other than investing scarce capital dollars to build costly comprehensive public colleges and universities. Cost effectiveness can be accomplished by placing educational centers strategically in high population growth areas where student demand is expected to increase substantially, and when the host district is at near capacity.

Educational centers also promote shared facility use and intersegmental collaboration, which enables the state and the public higher education systems to realize and sustain greater resource efficiencies. For example, CSU Bakersfield has an educational center on the grounds of Antelope Valley College. CSUB is able to manage four modular buildings under a negotiated ten-year ground and security lease. Other resources are the qualified pool of on-site community college instructors that could be employed by the center as adjunct faculty members, and instructional classrooms and laboratories made available by Antelope Valley College and local high schools. The partnership has helped the center to develop formal course articulation agreements to assist community college students who wish to transition to the center as upper-division transfer students.

The Los Rios Community College District is proposing an educational center that would be located on the UC Davis campus. The location is adjacent to a new technology high school of the Davis Unified

School District. This arrangement will allow for a wide range of possibilities for sharing resources and for promoting shared agreements.

Educational centers have the potential to increase learning productivity because students can spend more time engaged in learning and less time in commuter traffic to attend classes at a main campus. Public colleges and universities can also use educational centers to expand access in rural and remote areas. Rural centers are especially beneficial when community college districts, such as the Yuba Community College District, span a large geographic area that can include numerous counties.

Proposed Revisions to the Commission's Educational Center Guidelines

This section outlines recommended revisions to the Commission's guidelines governing approval of community college educational centers. The revisions pertain to the full-time equivalent students (FTES) threshold requirement, conditional approval, exceptions to the FTES threshold, and the definition of a grandfathered center. In some instances a discussion is provided with no recommendation because more clarification is needed.

Recommendation Regarding FTES Threshold

Commission guidelines require a community college educational center to serve at least 500 fall term FTES before it can be formally recognized as a State-approved center and thereby eligible to compete for State capital outlay funding. The Board of Governors threshold is nearly identical, except it requires a center to serve at least 500 FTES annually.

Although the Commission's threshold is based on fall term FTES, the Commission expects that the total number of weekly student contact hours (WSCH) of instruction generated on a yearly basis translates to at least 500 annual FTES ($WSCH \div 30 = FTES$). It is recommended that the Commission's enrollment requirement for centers be updated to reflect annual FTES enrollment, consistent with current Title 5 Regulations.

Recommendation Regarding Conditional Approval of Education Centers

Current Commission guidelines do not contain provisions for conditional approval of educational centers. Title 5 Regulations adopted this year contain provisions that authorize the Board of Governors to grant conditional approval of a community college off-campus operation if it is to be located in a high population growth area and if an enrollment analysis demonstrates that the center would serve 500 FTES annually by the third consecutive year of operation. If so, the center would be eligible to compete for state capital outlay funds once the FTES threshold is met.

Commission staff has initiated conversations with the Chancellor's Office. However, it is unclear whether the purpose and benefit that would result from conditional approval is of value. Some districts have expressed confusion regarding conditional approval. The Chancellor's Office confirmed with Commission staff that a conditionally approved center would not be eligible to compete for State capital outlay funds until it generates 500 annual FTES. The district must also submit an updated needs assessment study with a discussion of environmental impact issues. A key question is: Precisely what planning benefits would result from a center being conditionally approved? Until this question is addressed, Commission staff will not recommend or draft conditional approval provisions.

Recommendation Regarding Exceptions to the FTES Threshold

Title 5 Regulations have never contained explicit language governing exceptions to the FTES threshold. However, Commission staff and the Board of Governors have exercised judgment and flexibility in determining whether the level of FTES to be served by a proposed center was sufficient to make it viable

and worthy of state capital outlay funds. In such cases, the community's needs to be served by the center are carefully considered. In some instances, a center was allowed to compete for state capital outlay funding even if it served fewer than 500 FTES.

The Commission concurred with the recommendation of the Board of Governors to grant state-approved status to the Academy of Entertainment and Technology, an off-campus center of Santa Monica College. The center was proposed in response to growing concerns among motion picture and entertainment leaders about the insufficient pool of workers with technical skill in graphic design, computer programming, and software development. This sentiment was shared in 1997 by Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan, Santa Monica Mayor Paul Rosenstein, and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers.

In 1997, Santa Monica College did not have instructional space on its campus to support a new program initiative because the 1994 Northridge Earthquake had removed several buildings from service. That meant that an off-campus educational center was the only viable option for Santa Monica College to address workforce training needs in the film industry, a major employment sector within the college's service area. The Santa Monica proposal met all of the Commission's review criteria, except the 500 FTES threshold. Given the high local demand for skilled workers in the entertainment industry, coupled with unique local circumstances, the Commission and the Board of Governors granted approval status, with an understanding that its FTES enrollments would grow from 150 FTES in fall 1997 to at least 550 FTES by fall 1999 (see Commission Reports 97-04 and 08-09, www.cpec.ca.gov/CompleteReports/1997Reports/97-04.pdf, www.cpec.ca.gov/CompleteReports/2008Reports/08-09.pdf).

Another exception involved the Cabrillo Community College District. In 1997, the Commission concurred with the recommendation of the Board of Governors to grant state-approved status to the Watsonville outreach center, which had been in operation since 1987. The center occupied a renovated former post office building in the downtown area. The district had been marked by two cities: the City of Aptos, which at the time was a largely affluent White suburban community, and the City of Watsonville, which was over 80% Latino and had a 22% unemployment rate.

The Watsonville center was established to address educational deficiencies facing the community. Initially, it focused on language arts, basic skills, and occupational instruction. The district's proposal met all of the educational center review criteria, except the 500 FTES threshold requirement. Given the community's unique demographic and economic circumstances, the Commission and the Board of Governors concurred with the recommendation to grant state center status, with the condition that its FTES enrollments increase from 360 FTES to 500 FTES within three years. The enrollment threshold seemed attainable because a 33,000-square-foot addition was being built adjacent to the existing renovated post office (see Commission Report, www.cpec.ca.gov/CompleteReports/1997Reports/97-03.pdf).

A number of counties with significant rural and remote areas have neither a comprehensive community college nor an off-campus educational center within its boundaries. Area residents have expressed difficulty in achieving and sustaining a higher level of economic development because potential industry and business employers are often reluctant to establish sizable operations in areas that have little or no post-secondary educational presence.

The counties without a public community college campus or state-approved educational centers are: Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, Mariposa, Modoc, Sierra, and Sutter. Some areas do have community college outreach operations funded privately or by local bond initiatives.

Even though the state and nation are facing fiscal and financial challenges, preliminary analysis suggests that some off-campus educational centers might be worthy of state capital funding even if those operations are serving fewer than 500 FTES. Prudent judgments must be exercised in granting exceptions.

Such judgments should not be made until the economic health of California and the nation are restored. Commission analysts remain committed to exploring this issue with the Board of Governors, the Legislative Analyst's Office, the Chancellor's Office, and community college districts.

Recommendation Regarding Definition of a Grandfathered Community College Educational Center

The Commission defines a grandfathered center as one that is governed by a community college district and that has been formally recognized by the Commission in previous published reports. Each grandfathered location must have continuously enrolled students since its approval by the Commission. Locations approved by the Commission prior to April 2002 continue to be eligible for state capital outlay funding (see Commission Report 02-6, www.cpec.ca.gov/CompleteReports/2002Reports/02-06.pdf).

The definition of a grandfathered center differs from the Commission's definition in that the Title 5 regulation stipulates that a grandfathered center must have been identified by the Chancellor's Office as of academic year 2006–07. The definition that appears in Title 5 regulations is summarized below.

It is possible that a community college might have been recognized by the Commission in previous reports, while not having been identified by the Chancellor's Office as of 2006–07. While such an oversight is not likely, staff recommend that the issue be thoroughly researched before aligning the Commission's definition of a grandfathered center with the definition contained in Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations.

Per Title 5, a Grandfathered Educational Center is one that:

- Operated prior to April 1974 and was recognized as an approved grandfathered center by the California Postsecondary Education Commission in its December 10, 1984, report to the California Legislature.
- Served at least 100 FTES during year 2005–06, or had an average annual enrollment of at least 100 FTES for the three-year period, 2003–04 to 2006–06.
- Has operated continuously since 1974.
- Was owned or controlled by the district through a lease agreement.
- Provided an appropriate level of administrative and student services, given its FTES enrollment level.
- Was identified by the Community College Chancellor's Office as of 2006–07 as a grandfathered center.